



Regional Policy and Cohesion

447(57)

Peace

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The Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland

On 28 July 1995, The European Commission approved the Operational Programme, submitted by the United Kingdom and Irish governments, for the purpose of promoting and assisting peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland (see fact sheet 06.04.95). The aim is to help consolidate the cessation of the conflict by providing local economic and social actors with the resources to translate developments into a lasting peace and to facilitate the on-going progress towards reconciliation.

Total expenditure under the Programme in the first three years (1995-1997) will amount to ECU 416 million, of which ECU 300 million will be provided by the EU Structural Funds and ECU 95 million from the two central governments.

This Special Programme has been finalised with unprecedented speed which underlines the commitment at all levels in the European Union to further the positive developments being witnessed in the north of Ireland.

This fact sheet gives practical information on:

- the 5 priority fields of action eligible for support
- rates of funding and procedure
- the bodies responsible for implementation
- the provision of technical assistance.

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Consultation

The rationale behind the creation of the Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation has taken into account the overwhelming need to maintain the momentum for peace, the economic and social conditions in the eligible areas, the priorities set by the Commission for the programme, the results of the prior appraisal and the outcome of the consultation arrangements.

The consultation process was very inclusive and wide-ranging in both Northern Ireland and in Ireland covering meetings between many parties directly involved, public invitations for proposals on the Programme content, conferences sponsored by both governments and by the European institutions, and detailed submissions from local authorities.

The overwhelming opinion amongst those consulted was the special programme should specifically address the need to maintain the momentum for peace with grass-roots community involvement being considered essential. Throughout this process the priorities for the initiative were fully endorsed and a strong desire to see an immediate and visible impact on the ground. Furthermore, those consulted emphasised that, given the uniqueness of the special programme, the means of delivery should be equally innovative - notably through the implementation mechanisms including grant arrangements through intermediary bodies and partnerships.

2 Peace

Background

Northern Ireland faces a serious legacy of unemployment and economic underdevelopment due, in part, to twenty five years of violent conflict. There is now an unparalleled impetus towards resolving the conflict which the European Union seeks to encourage. In response, the European Council of Essen (December 1994) approved the principle of a multi-annual Structural Funds programme for Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland, setting aside an initial sum of ECU 300 million (1995-1997). 80% of the available resources are to be assigned to Northern Ireland and the remaining 20% to the border counties. The Initiative guidelines followed in May 1995 being based on the recommendations of a specially constituted Northern Ireland Task Force and followed consultation with the European Parliament and other EU bodies. The adoption of the Operational Programme (OP) in July represents the final step before individual projects can be funded. The OP is not a list of individual projects but rather a framework for the submission of projects. Therefore, there is still time to bid for support.

Five Priorities

The aim of the Initiative is to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation.

Twin strategic objectives are:

- to promote the social inclusion of those who are at the margins of social and economic life
- to exploit the opportunities and address the needs arising from the peace process in order to boost economic growth and advance social and economic regeneration.

In order to meet this aim five priority areas of action have been agreed:

- Urban and rural regeneration
- Employment
- Cross-border development
- Social inclusion
- Productive investment and industrial development

Project proposals must address these priority areas to attract support. However, given the nature of the problems that are being addressed by this special Initiative and the emphasis placed on it during the consultation process, the theme of social inclusion is to be given particular prominence receiving an expected 30% of total available resources.

Structural Fund contributions to the Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation

Fund	Millions of ECU
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	148.3
European Social Fund (ESF)	127.8
European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)	22.4
Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG)	1.5

% EU funding of the priorities by implementation mechanism

Priorities	Central Government	Intermediary bodies	Partnerships	Total
Employment	8.8%	5.1%	2.7%	16.6%
Urban and Rural Regeneration	13.5%	3.1%	2.8%	19.4%
Cross-border Development	7.8%	7.4%	-	15.0%
Social Inclusion	7.0%	16.5%	6.5%	30.0%
Productive Investment and Industrial Development	3.4%	11.2%	2.7%	17.4%
Technical Assistance	1.6%	-	-	1.6%
Total	41.8%	43.5%	14.7%	100.0%

(1) These figures relate only to district partnerships in Northern Ireland.

communities in towns and villages and their hinterlands, including where these straddle the border.

Measure 1a Urban and village renewal and tourism

Measure 1b Village renewal and tourism

Measure 2 Community-led development

3 Cross-border

The development of Cross-border networks and linkages has been inhibited by the conflict in Northern Ireland. A survey of cross-border trade carried out by the UCD in 1994 found that the security situation was the main barrier to cross-border trade. Estimates of the potential to increase jobs by increasing cross-border trade goes as high as 75 000. Cross-border contacts and linkages can be a vital first step in promoting such trade. Within the special Community Initiative at least 15% of the overall amount will be devoted to activities which are carried out in a cross-border context.

Measure 1 Business and cultural linkages

Measure 2 Infrastructure

Measure 3 Co-operation between public bodies

Measure 4 Cross-border reconciliation

There will also be scope for cross-border actions under the other Sub-Programmes.

4 Social Inclusion

Beyond community conflict, Northern Ireland faces high levels of unemployment, especially youth and long-term unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, social deprivation in urban and some rural areas and the need to reintegrate ex-prisoners. There are also high levels of out-migration. The unique opportunities for change and improvement call for radical solutions to tackle the root cause of these problems. A flexible combination of economic and social measures across a broad range of fields including early childhood education, health, housing and cross-community co-operation will be available.

The aim is to promote pathways to reconciliation by encouraging grass-roots

and cross-community co-operation, especially in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and the border counties as well as action to address the difficulties faced by vulnerable groups such as victims, children, young people and those previously caught up with violence including prisoners and ex-prisoners. A broad-based community development approach will be encouraged as well as local, cross-community partnerships across a wide range of areas including culture, the arts and sport.

Measure 1 Developing grass roots capacities and promoting the inclusion of women

Measure 2 Preventing exclusion

Measure 3 Promoting the inclusion of children and young people

Measure 4 Promoting the inclusion of vulnerable groups and improving the accessibility and quality of services aimed at these groups

Measure 5 Promoting pathways to reconciliation

Measure 6 Accompanying infrastructure and equipment support

5 Productive Investment / Industrial Development

The aim of this Sub-Programme is to stimulate private sector investment leading to sustainable employment and development especially in disadvantaged areas. There is a need for new and enhanced initiatives in the areas of marketing, trade and innovation, urging greater opportunities for networking within Ireland and beyond and a greater emphasis on the clustering of related companies. A need for new corporate approaches to economic development policy has been expressed, as has the need for the stimulation of indigenous industry and incentives to long-term investment. The European Investment Bank (EIB) and the banking sector will manage an interest rate subsidy scheme proposed at 4%.

Measure 1 Investment promotion

Measure 2 New industrial development services

Measure 3 Trade development

Mainstream Structural Funding

Northern Ireland, as an Objective 1 region, benefits from substantial assistance from the European Union's Structural Funds beyond what is being offered through the Peace and Reconciliation Special Programme. ECU 1.233 billion in Community assistance has been set aside for the Province between 1994 and 1999. These resources are divided between 6 priority areas: promoting economic development and competitiveness (25%); investment in communities and people (25.5%); reducing the effects of peripherality (26%); the development of agriculture, fisheries and the rural economy (18%); and protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment (5.5%).

Ireland is also an Objective 1 region facing many problems that are arresting development. The Community has agreed the programmes implementing the Community Support Framework with Ireland, mobilising ECU 5.62 billion between 1994 and 1999 which is to be allocated as follows: the productive sector (38.9%); economic infrastructure (19.8%); human resources (37.6%); and local urban and rural development (3.6%).

Funding - implementation mechanisms

In the border counties it is foreseen that more than half of the programme resources will be delivered under global grant contracts signed by the Commission and intermediary bodies. In Northern Ireland it is also the aim to disburse more than half of the EU assistance through decentralised organisations. Of this, ECU 44 million will be delivered through Partnerships which provide a direct, bottom-up approach to empower people at local level to decide actions for local areas. This will help to ensure that the programme will benefit all communities in an equitable and balanced way whilst concentrating on those areas and people who have suffered most from the conflict.

No less than ECU 50 million is to be disbursed through bodies that are independent of government such as women's organisations and those covering cross-border actions. Technical assistance will be provided under the Programme to ensure sound financial management by such intermediary bodies.

Funds will equally be allocated through central government departments or statutory funding bodies and through intermediary funding bodies in order to foster closer contact with the beneficiaries and to distinguish projects which best meet the needs of the sectors concerned.

Monitoring and the Consultative Forum

Responsibility for overseeing the correct implementation of the programme will be invested in a Monitoring Committee made up of representatives of both governments, the European Commission, the EIB, local authorities, business, trade unions, community groups and voluntary organisations and the joint chairpersons of the Consultative Forum.

The Consultative Forum is a structure representing local interests and grass-roots opinion throughout the eligible areas. It will consist of representatives drawn from the voluntary sector, the community sector, local government, employers and employees organisations, representatives of women's groups, the agricultural and fishing sectors, education, statutory bodies and other interests.

Evaluation of the programme will be the responsibility of both Member States and the Commission. Evaluation will attempt to confirm the extent to which the objectives of the Sub-Programmes have been achieved and the degree of efficiency and effectiveness obtained. A first evaluation will take place during 1997.

Complementarity

Whilst there is some cross-over between the objectives of the mainstream Structural Fund supported actions and those of the Peace Programme, there are differences in many crucial respects.

Under the Special Programme:

- the principle objective is embedding the peace process and promoting reconciliation
- the economic impact may be indirect/long term
- eligible actions are more broad-ranging, target the vulnerable and those most affected by the conflict
- support is immediate to exploit emerging opportunities
- innovative delivery mechanisms (partnerships, intermediary funding bodies) seek to empower weakened local decision-taking.

In addition to the new opportunities offered through the Special Programme, the two Member States have agreed to re-focus Structural Funds programmes in response to the new demands and challenges arising from the cessation of violence - optimising support for sustained economic and social development of the two regions.

Contact addresses

Northern Ireland

**General Information, Cross-border,
Technical assistance, Partnerships**
Department of Finance and Personnel
European Division
The Arches Centre
11-13 Bloomfield Avenue
UK - Belfast BT5 5HD
Tel: +44 1232 526 938

Employment
Training and Employment Agency
Clarendon House
9-21 Adelaide Street
UK - Belfast BT2 8DJ
Tel: +44 1232 541 648

Urban Regeneration
Department of Environment
Urban Regeneration
Clarence Court
Adelaide Street
UK - Belfast BT2 86B
Tel: +44 1232 540 868

Rural Regeneration
Department of Agriculture
Dundonald House
Upper Newtonards Road
UK - Belfast BT4 3SB
Tel: +44 1232 524 331

Social Inclusion
**Department of Health and Social
Services**
Social Inclusion Branch
Annex 3, Castle Buildings
Stormont
UK - Belfast BT4 3RA
Tel: +44 1232 522 595

Productive Investment
**Department of Economic
Development**
European Communities Branch
Netherleigh
Massey Avenue
UK - Belfast BT4 2JP
Tel: +44 1232 529 254

Ireland

Mr Sean O'Sullivan
EU Structural Funds Section
Department of Finance
IRL - Dublin 2
Tel: +353 1 676 75 71

Dr Tony Crooks
Chief Executive Officer
ADM Ltd
Holbrook House
Holles Street
IRL - Dublin 2
Tel: +353 1 661 36 11

Mr Hugh Fraser
Director
Combat Poverty Agency
8 Charlemont Street
IRL - Dublin 2
Tel: +353 478 33 55



European Commission
Directorate-General for Regional Policy and Cohesion

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This publication does not necessarily express the official views of the Commission. For further information, please contact: Mr L. Nigl.
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COMMISSION APPROVES INITIATIVE FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

On a proposal by Monika WULF-MATHIES, Commissioner responsible for Regional Policies and the Cohesion Fund, the Commission approved today the guidelines for a Community Initiative which will make available 300 Mio ECU for Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland(1) to support peace and reconciliation.

"I am delighted that the Commission with this decision makes its contribution to the historic process which started on 15 December 1993 through the Joint Declaration of the United Kingdom and the Irish Prime Ministers," said Mrs Wulf-Mathies. "The Community's special support programme will hopefully help to consolidate the peace process."

The programme consists of a concerted effort by the Commission and the Member States concerned to create jobs, reduce unemployment and promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland by encouraging grassroots and cross border cooperation.

The initiative, which was drawn up in agreement with President Jacques Santer and Commissioners Padraig Flynn and Franz Fischler implements the decision of principle endorsed by the European Council at Essen in December 1994. The proposal announced today is a first decision and will now be sent for consultation to the European Parliament, to the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and the Management Committee for Community Initiatives. After these consultations the final Commission decision will be taken in May 1995 at the latest.

The 300 Mio ECU approved will cover the first three years (1995/97) of the overall five-year special support program. This amount will be genuinely additional to other Community and regional efforts. Further financing for the years 1998/99 will be subject to a Commission review. The Community will finance up to 75% of the cost of measures under the initiative. In the Commission's view, this would mean that a maximum of 80% would be available for activities in Northern Ireland and at least 20% for activities in the border counties. Moreover at least 15% of the overall amount will be devoted to activities carried out in a cross border context.

The guidelines proposed by the Commission have been drawn up on the basis of the Commission's Communication to the Essen European Council, which had already indicated five priority areas which the European Union felt could contribute best to the process of peace and reconciliation.

Employment opportunities to facilitate reducing long-term unemployment and providing sustainable jobs, particularly for the long-term unemployed, the young and the women, should contribute decisively to boosting economic growth and to reinforcing the reconciliation process. Mrs. Wulf-Mathies places significant importance on local employment initiatives and on initiatives aimed at redirecting redundant skills to help the long-term unemployed in their reintegration in the labor market.

Urban and rural regeneration measures will contribute to the restoration of damage to the physical surroundings of the cities and revitalize the sometimes deserted areas. These measures are not only necessary for attracting business but also bringing people together through the creation of local partnerships to develop and manage development plans.

Cross-border development is an essential part of the special initiative.

Apart from enhancing trade, economic and agricultural cooperation it is also envisaged to promote cooperation between local authorities, healthcare establishments, business (in particular SMEs), education and training providers and voluntary organizations.

Social inclusion measures will be of paramount importance to the reconciliation process through the development of grassroots cooperation. They should be locally driven and offer a practical opportunity for both communities to get together and build reconciliation.

Productive investment and industrial development are also expected to contribute to the consolidation of the peace process by securing existing jobs and creating new ones, particularly in SMEs. A range of tools is envisaged including marketing support, seed and venture capital, interest subsidies, better linkage of large firms and SMEs as well as the promotion of local supplier networks.

In this context Mrs. Wulf-Mathies underlines that the list of measures which the Commission proposes is not exhaustive and therefore any suitable proposal which may come up will be carefully considered.

To receive support the member states concerned will have to submit detailed proposals for an integrated operational programme within four months after the final decision on the programme. In preparing and implementing the proposals local authorities, business, trade unions, community groups and voluntary organizations will be involved.

(1) Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo, Donegal
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OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR IRELAND

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE : EMPLOYMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

On a proposal by Mr Padraig Flynn, Member of the Commission responsible for Social Affairs and Employment, the Commission has approved an Operational Programme providing for Community assistance from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the Community initiative "Employment and Development of Human Resources" in favour of Ireland for the period 1994-99.

The contribution from the ESF and ERDF for the period covered by the Operational Programme amounts to 76.1 MECU and will concern 71,987 people. When national and private funding is added to Community assistance the full amount to be spent on this Programme is 99.492 MECU. The Programme comprises measures to meet the following objectives :

- (a) under Employment-NOW, to further the integration of women into vocational training, employment, and business creation; to address the issue of segregation of women in employment and to make secure and improve the status of employment for women in sectors undergoing industrial and organisational change; to ensure that within public and private organisations, procedures, practices and personnel are gender-inclusive in their operations; to strengthen social cohesion between women living in disadvantaged and marginalised circumstances; and to develop new structures and practices in the labour market which facilitate the reconciliation between family responsibilities and working life;
- (b) under Employment-HORIZON, to improve the labour market entry opportunities for disabled people and certain other disadvantaged groups through the creation and development, on a transnational basis, of pilot projects of an innovative nature;
- (c) under Employment-YOUTHSTART, to provide support for measures which will act as a catalyst for youth schemes across the European Union by means of transnational innovative pilot actions which assist the labour market integration of young people under 20 years of age who have not acquired a marketable vocational qualification.

Summary description of the groups of measures :

The overall set of measures covered in the Operational Programme for Ireland is aimed at the implementation of the national strategies to meet the objectives defined by the European Council following consideration of the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment and of the White Paper on European Social Policy. As stated in both White Papers, efforts should be directed at the adaptation and improvement of vocational training systems, vocational placement, and employment creation at all levels: local, national and European. To meet these objectives, the

projects developed under this Operational Programme will aim for innovation not only in terms of the technical content but also in terms of analysis of innovatory outcomes which will be incorporated into mainstream programmes or other national policies.

Transnational collaboration between project promoters is the other keynote of this Community initiative. Such cooperation will allow promoters to enrich their knowledge and analysis of policies and practice in other Member States of the European Union. This cooperation must be grounded in a concrete plan and work programme agreed between the transnational partners and in a common will to transfer innovation across regional and national boundaries.

Within this framework, the measures under Employment-NOW will contribute to the development of training, guidance and counselling systems, the delivery of training, and job creation and support.

No. of planned participants under NOW:	38,275
Amount available under NOW:	18.565 MECU

The measures under Employment-HORIZON will contribute to the development of training, guidance and counselling systems, the delivery of training, and job creation and support.

No. of planned participants under HORIZON:	13,307
Amount available under HORIZON:	36.59 MECU

The measures under Employment-YOUTHSTART will contribute to the development of training, guidance and counselling systems, and the delivery of training.

No. of planned participants under Youthstart:	20,405
Amount available under Youthstart:	15.02 MECU

The sum of 5.925 MECU has been earmarked for technical assistance purposes.

Commenting on the approval of the Operational Programme, Commissioner Flynn said the following : "I fully expect this Programme, which has been adopted within the framework of the Employment Initiative, will not only make a significant contribution to the development of human resources in Ireland but will also help the labour market function more smoothly whilst promoting social solidarity and equal opportunities for women in the workforce".

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